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STATE PLEASE PASS TO DHS

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SUBJECT: EMBASSY STOCKHOLM'S FEEDBACK ON ESTA

REF: State 58479

¶1. SUMMARY: An initial review of ESTA among various offices at Post raised several questions, including whether we can provide a prototype of the ESTA website as part of our outreach efforts and how ESTA will interface with the Class database and airline systems. This cable also outlines Post's initial and future outreach plans. End Summary.

¶2. QUESTIONS ON ESTA IMPLEMENTATION: Following DHS Secretary Chertoff's June 3 press conference announcing ESTA, Post experienced a sharp increase in questions about ESTA from local business contacts, the general public, and the press. Interest quickly waned, however, both due to the summer vacation season and travelers' realization that the program is not mandatory until January 2009. Post anticipates that questions on the ESTA program will increase again around the program's launch in August and mandatory implementation in January 2009.

¶3. In general, external questions about the ESTA program have focused on when it will become mandatory, who is required to register, and how applicants will be notified. Prospective travelers are also confused about whether visa applicants must also register through the ESTA program. An initial review of ESTA among various offices at Post raised additional concerns and questions. Questions:

-- Can we provide a prototype of the ESTA website as part of our outreach efforts?

-- Will the ESTA FAQ's provide information on why a traveler might be denied travel authorization?

-- If incorrect information is entered on the ESTA application, will applicants be penalized for misrepresentation?

-- How will airlines access the information or know if passengers have ESTA approval?

-- Is it mandatory for travelers to continue to update new itinerary information in ESTA after approval?

-- What happens if the ESTA site goes down?

-- What will prevent someone from maliciously entering negative data for another traveler in an effort to generate a refusal?

-- When will ESTA replace the I-94W form?

-- How will consular officers access the ESTA outcome?

-- If the reason for an ESTA denial is not available to consular officers, how will they assess the impact of the negative ESTA decision on visa eligibility?

¶4. OUTREACH EFFORTS: As part of our outreach efforts, CONOFFS briefed MFA Counselor at the Americas Desk Paula Wennerblom and MOJ Deputy Director for Migration and Asylum Policy Kerstin Lindblad on June 3 on the launch of ESTA. They responded positively to the information and Post assured them we would provide additional information to them and other relevant government officials when it becomes available.

¶5. Post is also developing a coordinated outreach plan to target key constituencies affected by ESTA and plans to use the August 1 launch date as an opportunity to host a series of roundtables, press conferences, and public forums on the ESTA program. Some other current and future efforts include:

- educating embassy officers about ESTA so they can answer questions from contacts;

- linking information about ESTA on Post's external website;

- holding seminars and meetings at the Embassy with key stakeholders, including the American Chamber of Commerce, travel industry representatives, local airline representatives, and other private sector groups; and

- disseminating information on ESTA through local radio station programs and print media, including travel and business magazines.

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